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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2107

2108 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-2107
(202) 225-2836

DISTRICT OFFICES:

5 HIGH STREET, SUITE 101
MEDFORD, MA 02155
(781) 396-2900188 CONCORD STREET, SUITE 102
FRAMINGHAM, MA 01702
(508) 875-2900
www.house.gov/markay

January 28, 2004

The Honorable Tom Ridge
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to include full funding for the Metropolitan Medical Response System (MMRS) as part of the Administration's FY 2005 budget request to be submitted to Congress next month. According to recent media reports, DHS is considering an 80% reduction in the MMRS from \$50 million to only \$10 million¹. As you know, the MMRS is a key component of the nation's strategy for responding to a terrorist attack involving a radiological dispersal device, or "dirty bomb", and I sincerely hope the budget request will fund the MMRS program at or above the FY 2004 appropriated level.

The initial impetus for the MMRS program was the terrorist release of military nerve gas in a Tokyo subway in 1995. The program now provides funding to over 100 American cities to improve local first responders' ability to deal with chemical, biological and radiological attacks. In exchange for this funding, city authorities must provide the DHS Office of Emergency Preparedness with detailed information on their terrorism response plans. The Institute of Medicine released a study of MMRS in 2002, finding that "the committee has been favorably impressed by the program's focus on empowering local communities, as opposed to creating yet another federal team to rush to the community at the time of an incident"².

The importance of the MMRS program in protecting U.S. cities from dirty bombs should not be underestimated. Dirty bombs pose a serious threat to American homeland security, as became evident last year in reports that al Qaeda is seeking materials for a dirty bomb in North America³. A recent study by the National Defense University concluded that casualties from a dirty bomb could be much higher than previously thought, stating that "the U.S. should be prepared to cope with tens, hundreds, or conceivably thousands of victims of acute radiation sickness" in the event of an attack.⁴ We have also recently learned that concern about dirty

¹ See "Big Cut Coming for Program to Cope with Dirty Bombs and Other Major Weapons," *CQ Homeland Security*, January 12, 2004.

² See "Preparing for Terrorism: Tools for Evaluating the Metropolitan Medical Response System Program," Institute of Medicine, 2002.

³ See "Al Qaeda Pursued a 'Dirty Bomb'," *Washington Times*, October 17, 2003.

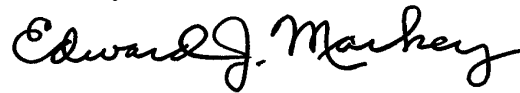
⁴ See "Dirty Bombs: The Threat Revisited," Peter D. Zimmerman with Cheryl Loeb, Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, January 2004.

bombs was a major factor in the Orange Alert issued by DHS over the holidays⁵. You may know that I have introduced H.R. 891, the Dirty Bomb Prevention Act, which would improve the nation's ability to keep radiological materials for building dirty bombs out of the wrong hands. A robust MMRS is an important complement to our efforts to prevent unauthorized access to radiological materials.

In light of the serious and ongoing threat posed to homeland security from terrorist dirty bombs and the positive impact of the MMRS program on our dirty bomb preparedness, clearly it makes more sense to increase its funding rather than drastically cut it. I call on the Department to ensure that funding for the MMRS program at or above the FY 2004 appropriated level is included in the FY 2005 budget request.

I appreciate your attention to this important issue and look forward to the Department's response. If you have any questions, please contact Jeff Duncan of my staff at 202-225-2836.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Edward J. Markey
Member of Congress

⁵ See "'Dirty Bomb' Was Major New Year's Worry," *Washington Post*, January 7, 2004.